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NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS COMMITTEE ON UNICEF
STATEMENT TO THE UNICEF EXECUTIVE BOARD

1. Thank you for this opportunity to speak with you. As non-governmental organizations (NGOs), we see a greater recognition by the world at large of the crucial human resources we bring to the international landscape. We are a part of the responsive citizenry who work to involve the world's peoples in the mission of UNICEF.

2. But our NGO Committee on UNICEF represents just a token of the tremendous life-force that NGOs bring to the goals and programmes supported by UNICEF at national and regional levels. That far-reaching participation of national NGOs is a story still to be told.

3. The activities of the NGO Committee on UNICEF continue to be guided by the two benchmark documents for children - the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the World Summit Plan of Action.

4. We heard the Executive Director's call for universal ratification of the Convention by the year 1995 and can only add our wholehearted support.

5. As ratifications continue to come in, we are turning our attention to implementation. We feel strongly that the entire United Nations system should support countries in their efforts to provide for children the conditions described in the Convention's articles. The NGO Committee on UNICEF, therefore, co-sponsored with UNICEF and the United Nations Centre for Human Rights a consultation on "The Role of the United Nations and NGOs in the Implementation of the Convention" in late March 1993.

6. The consultation was attended by representatives of 11 United Nations agencies and 37 international NGOs. The outcome was a statement of recommendations for action by NGOs, Governments, donors, the United Nations system and the Committee on the Rights of the Child. Since the consultation was

a satellite meeting of the World Conference on Human Rights, its recommendations will be submitted to the Conference in Vienna, Austria, in June 1993. Copies of the statements are available on the table at the back of the room.

7. NGOs are concerned, as are many of you, about modern warfare strategies that kill and maim civilians, including children, in greater proportions than soldiers. Who can forget the media images we have seen of children in the former Yugoslavia, Somalia and southern Sudan?

8. The fact is that many combatants and civilians are not aware of the protections for children written into international law. An NGO Working Group wrote and began distribution of a "Summary of international treaties to protect children in armed conflict". We would appreciate your taking one of the copies available on the table at the back of this room. You can explore with your Governments ways in which these treaties can be publicized and enforced.

9. The NGO Committee on UNICEF will hold its third meeting of Chief Executive Officers of major humanitarian and development organizations in Geneva, Switzerland, in January 1994 on the contribution of youth to lasting peace. The prevention of violence in the resolution of conflicts is one of the priority goals of many NGOs, and youth have an important role to play.

10. Following up on the World Summit for Children, NGOs in many countries have been active in helping to develop and implement national programmes of action (NPAs). Those developed by African Governments were discussed at the December 1992 International Conference on Assistance to African Children held in Dakar, Senegal. NGOs were very pleased to be able to attend as full participants, and reconfirmed their commitment to working with Governments on NPAs. One of the outcomes has been a renewed focus on Africa by a number of major NGOs. The NGO Committee on UNICEF likewise welcomed the commitment by donors to increasing the percentage of official development assistance which is allocated to social development. We hope that donors will act urgently on this commitment, which is of such importance to the children of Africa.

11. At two other major conferences last year - the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development and the International Conference on Nutrition - NGOs worked hard with UNICEF staff to ensure attention to children's needs and the inclusion of quantifiable goals. We very much want these goals to be reflected in your NPAs.

12. We are very pleased to see the strong action that some of you have taken to advance the education of girls and women, which we now know is a key factor in the social and economic development of a nation. This year, to follow up on last year's two successful conferences on the topic, the NGO Committee on UNICEF has formed a task force to collect information about programmes that actually increase girls' access to education. Through the joint United Nations/NGO Education for All Network created after the Jomtien Conference, this information will be used to mobilize NGOs to invest more of their resources in the reduction of gender disparity.

13. The NGO Committee on UNICEF has focused on two regions this year in its efforts to strengthen national NGOs. The first region is Eastern and Central Europe, where the NGO Committee on UNICEF held a consultation with national

counterparts just over one month ago. NGOs in Eastern and Central Europe are emerging in considerable numbers, and proving to be effective and innovative actors in the field of child protection, family life, welfare and development in the region. The report on the consultation will be available in July 1993.

14. The second region is in Central America, where, during this International Year for the World's Indigenous Peoples, plans are being made by the NGO Committee on UNICEF to hold a regional conference on the Convention in November 1993.

15. We very much value UNICEF support for the work of NGOs. We are particularly pleased with the increased level of collaboration in information and advocacy programmes that has resulted from the strengthening of the secretariat in New York and at Geneva. As NGOs, we will continue to function in ways that promote the mission and vision of UNICEF in the world. I believe we all realize, as Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali has said, "we must seize the moment for the sake of the future".